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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, NEA/PI AND PDAS CARPENTER

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SUBJECT: MEPI UPDATE FOR MOROCCO

REF: A) Rabat 0399, B) 06 Rabat 2509

¶1. Summary: This cable highlights MEPI programs and initiatives in Morocco from April 1-June 30. New activities included visits by representatives from MEPI Washington and the approval of two small grant proposals. Highlights from existing programs included the launch of the MEPI Alumni Network, a workshop on the right to access information, two new written guides to promote women's rights, a showcase of women candidates' campaign plans, a training program for women's business and legal skills, and a visit by the Vice President of Scholastic Inc. Implementers continue to partner with local NGOs at the grassroots level to support numerous programs committed to reform in the four MEPI pillars. End Summary.

MEPI VISITORS

¶2. NEA's PDAS Scott Carpenter visited Morocco June 4-7 to meet with GOM officials, civil society leaders and several MEPI recipients. Morocco's upcoming elections and the issue of press freedom dominated discussions which also included judicial reform, the importance of civil society organizations and youth programs. He had a wide-ranging meeting with the MFA's Director of Bilateral Affairs Yousef Amrani; reviewed election issues with prominent female leaders, MEPI recipients and civil society advocates; discussed the issue of press freedom with the Minister of Communications Nabil Benabdellah and prominent journalists; met with the American Bar Association; and visited a youth center in an under privileged neighborhood of Rabat to discuss a number of issues affecting the lives of its members. It was a successful visit that featured extensively in a FACT DVC between Washington and Mission Morocco on June 28.

¶3. MEPI's Senior Grant Officer Anna Mary Portz visited Rabat from March 13-17. She conducted monitoring activities with MEPI implementers MTDS-Tanmia and Demos Consulting and met with the International Financial Corporation. She also discussed MEPI programs and ways to improve coordination and communication between posts, MEPI regional offices and Washington.

¶4. Chad Bettes from NEA/PI visited Morocco from May 15-18 to officially launch the MEPI Alumni Network. He met with members of the Network's steering committee and MEPI alumni to review the network's goals and to discuss next steps and work coordination. He also met with the Alumni Coordinator and the Director of the America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST). The MEPI Alumni Network will include quarterly activities, an online hub with information about financial opportunities, and provide opportunities to remain in contact with other MEPI alumni in the

region.

TWO NEW MEPI SMALL GRANTS

¶15. In May, post approved two new MEPI small grants to NGOs totaling \$45,349. Both pertain to the political pillar. The first recipient, Al Akhawayn University, will conduct a survey to assess public opinion towards political institutions, and economic and social conditions in Morocco. The second, Association Action Jeunesse, seeks to increase awareness of the importance of political participation among Moroccan youth, especially in light of the country's upcoming elections.

THE MEPI ALUMNI NETWORK

¶16. On April 6, the MEPI Alumni Network was established in Morocco as well as in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Yemen. The MEPI Alumni Network facilitated by AMIDEAST, is designed to accelerate the momentum of organizations working to advance reforms and bring increased peace and prosperity to the people of the Middle East and North Africa. A steering committee was formed to provide leadership and vision for the Alumni Network. The members represent the diversity of MEPI pillars; they are business CEOs, women's rights activists, student leaders, political candidates and community reformers. Ambassador Riley participated in a July 13 event that launched the steering committee's work plan.

THE RIGHT TO ACCESS INFORMATION

RABAT 00001201 002 OF 003

¶17. The International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) funded a workshop in Marrakech on May 26-27 entitled "Media, Administration and the Right to Access Information in Morocco." The event, organized by the MEPI-funded Moroccan association Adala (Justice), attracted 26 participants including: two MPs, a representative from the Ministry of Public Sector Modernization, lawyers, journalists, civil society members and human rights leaders. A member of parliament from the USFP (socialist party), Fatima Belmoudden, presented a proposal for a draft law promoting access to information. Participants offered feedback on how to improve the proposal before presenting it to parliament.

NEW GUIDES TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S RIGHTS

¶18. The Moroccan legal landscape was enriched by the introduction of two new practical guides designed to promote women's rights. MEPI-funded Global Rights, working with local NGOs, recently completed two publications titled "Promoting Access to Justice for Women in Morocco" and "Building Networks for Women's Rights." Published in Arabic to help ensure a wider distribution, the two publications support women's rights by building the capacity of local associations to identify and interpret laws relating to women in society.

WOMEN CANDIDATES' CAMPAIGN PLANS

¶19. Against the backdrop of upcoming elections in Algeria and Morocco, more than 60 women, including several potential candidates, participated in the fifth Women's Regional Campaign Academy entitled "Partners in Participation" from April 15-19 in Marrakech. Organized by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), this unique event provided participants with an opportunity to showcase their achievements while supporting and encouraging others who aspire to become more politically active. The Academy also offered women from across the region a chance to meet and develop a network of

colleagues, not only from the Middle East and North Africa, but also from around the world, who, are also dedicated politicians and activists. This important program featured more than a dozen international campaign experts and several distinguished guests, including Ambassador Riley, Congresswoman Jane Harman, Parliamentarian Milouda Hazeb, the Minister-Delegate for Moroccans Living Abroad, and the Mayor of Marrakech.

WOMEN'S BUSINESS AND LEGAL SKILLS TRAINING

¶10. Thirty-six women from the Middle East and North Africa are in the United States to participate in a six-month MEPI-sponsored Legal and Business Fellowship Program intended to develop their educational and leadership skills. The fellows were selected from more than 500 applicants, based on their leadership potential and commitment to professional growth in the business and legal sectors of their countries. Starting in March, they studied for one month at either the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business or Law School, followed by five-month internships working with leading U.S. corporations and law firms.

SCHOLASTIC'S VICE PRESIDENT VISITS MOROCCO

¶11. Dr. Carol Sakoian, Vice President of MEPI implementer Scholastic Inc., visited Rabat from June 13-17 for meetings with GOM officials and for site visits related to the "My Arabic Library" (MAL) program. On June 15, Sakoian met with the Ministry Education's Secretary General El Abida to discuss the evolution of the program

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and later met with Minister of Education Habib El Maliki (who expressed his thanks for the project), Minister of Culture Mohammed Achaari, and Director of Books, Libraries and Archives at the Ministry of Culture Mounya Nejjar. On June 16, Sakoian visited schools in the rural region of Khemisset that participate in the MAL program and met with post's Public Diplomacy staff to discuss the positive feedback on MAL.

¶12. A detailed description of MEPI programs in Morocco can be found on the Mission unclassified internet web page at www.usembassy.ma.

RABAT 00001201 003 OF 003

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